

1/5/10

Soho Atlanta restaurant named Vinings Business of the Year

By Everett Catts

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The Vinings Business Association handed out its inaugural Vinings Business of the Year award today to Soho Atlanta restaurant.

At its monthly meeting at Social Vinings restaurant, the organization honored Soho and its owners, Frank and Susan Smith, with the 2009 prize. The restaurant annually donates to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Home Depot and area schools and hosts the Vinings Historic Preservation Society's annual wine pairings party fundraiser each April.

"That's what the spirit of Vinings is all about," association President Bill Borden said.

Soho and four other businesses - Fidelity Bank, Garrison's Broiler and Tap, the Old Vinings Inn and Marlow's Tavern - were the finalists for the honor.

"When we opened in '97, we followed the lead of businesses like Fidelity Bank and Garrison's Broiler and Tap, which opened not long after we did," Frank Smith said. "We just got actively involved, whether it was [the] Lovett [School] or Teasley [Elementary School] or another school. I just want to thank everyone and we look forward to a great year."

Before the award was announced, 2009 association President Robert Meyring was given a plaque for his service.

As Frank Smith accepted the business award, Borden said, "Frank is also a past [VBA] president."

"I didn't get a plaque when I was president," the honoree said, drawing laughter from the crowd.

Borden said the association started the nomination process in September, and it received at least two dozen recommendations for the award. The group narrowed the list down to five finalists in December, when the representatives of each one spoke at that month's meeting. The winner was selected by the organization's committee and board members.

"The criteria is for not only a successful business and a charitable business but also one that captures the essence of the spirit of Vinings," Borden said, adding picking a winner was difficult. "That was rough, because any of the five finalists could have won. With the five finalists, we had to narrow it down to the best and it was like asking a parent to choose their favorite child."

Borden said he hopes the four other finalists are nominated again for the 2010 award.

In other news, the association announced its 2010 officers in addition to Borden: Glenn Christian, president-elect; Chris Heuser, vice president; Michael Moore, membership director; and Patrick Stafford, treasurer.

Information: visit www.viningsbusiness.com.